

THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT AS EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK:

A PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY REVIEW

by

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ABSTRACT

Priorities of public education systems are problematic in that they sacrifice effectiveness, meaningfulness, morality and empowerment in favor of neoliberal agendas and disciplinary instruction methods. An alternative framework is needed if education is to prepare its students to be mindful, compassionate, and active members of their society. This document proposes and explores a framework compiled from perspectives of pedagogy, philosophy and psychology best articulated as thoughtful engagement. The author asks: How would an educator foster thoughtfully engaged students? This framework reexamines the conditions under which students learn best and thrive in school settings. Understanding these conditions will help educators create the type of environments which allow for the innate capacity to develop into an educated and thoughtfully engaged citizen.

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Part 1: The Problems

While there are a multitude of criticisms being leveled at public education today, the fundamental problem can be reduced to two interlocking parts. One explores the goals of schooling and the other teaching methods, yet aim and method are inseparably intertwined. I propose a framework that will aid in approaching both.

Neoliberal Agenda

Students experience schooling which is funded and defined by the neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism is a long-standing American political philosophy and way of life which values market-based politics, economic decentralization, utilitarianism, and competitive individualism (FitzSimmons, 2015; Giroux, 2002; Echeverria & Hannam, 2013). In addition to being a political and economic feature of the United States, it has cultural implications. Lifestyles of idolized Americans – those who exemplify the potential of the modern American dream – express the importance of associating wealth with freedom. Within this framework, in order to pursue security, life, liberty and happiness, one must pursue production, consumption, profits, and surplus.

The neoliberal equation has shaped the culture of success so much that it has also permeated the heart of education systems, for “learning that used to have an emphasis on the collective good is now seen as a model for work preparation as students are prepped as human capital for future employment” (FitzSimmons, 2015, p. 210). We see this in the explanations that parents often give their children in encouraging or threatening them to do well in school. We see this in the career-readiness programs that infiltrate not only high school but all the way down to early elementary school. I remember many occasions as early as kindergarden when the

children in the class were asked the classic and well-intended question, “and what do *you* want to be when you grow up, dear?” I remember my teacher’s disappointment when, given this as a drawing assignment, I drew a picture of a happy woman and child in a sunny vegetable garden saying, “I want to be a great mom!” They were much happier when I told them I wanted to be an engineer or a doctor.

When students experience schooling grounded in neoliberal ideas and values, they learn that personal economic success is of utmost importance. In order achieve success, one must have a well-paying job. Therefore, students must be prepared to be competitive members of the workforce. The Common Core for example, currently used by 43 states, is an explicit set of “college- and career-ready standards... designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to take credit bearing introductory courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce” (“Common Core Standards” 2010).

The way that the neoliberal agenda is influencing education is a moral problem in two important ways. First, it prioritizes profits for the school and its investors over the interests and health of the students themselves. FitzSimmons identifies this as a problem because it

places education and schooling at the behest of big business where finance and investment takes prominence over the student and her emotional and social wellbeing... It places the student as an object and not as the subject in the classroom and allows the student to be disempowered by silencing her voice and deadening her mind. (2015, p. 233)

When students are managed like products valued at their potential for profits and neglected in order to minimize expenses, the reality of the student's experience in school is far from ideal.

The effect of neoliberal agenda in schooling is also morally problematic because it teaches students to value economic self-gain above all else. It frames citizenship as a "privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain" (Giroux, 2002, p. 429). Schools therefore are charged with preparing their students for the market in the end, even if the shorter-term goals are preparation for more schooling. Even "the university that was once seen as a place where the act of dreaming prospered and new ideas flourished has now become an institution where dreaming and ideas are commercialized and commodified" (FitzSimmons, 2015, p. 212). By educating students under the neoliberal agenda, students learn that "personal identity based on economic competition and elitism" (Echeverria & Hannam, 2013, p. 122) is more important than other priorities such as personal growth, community and land stewardship, social justice and other moral priorities.

Disciplinary Instruction

While aims of education and methods of education may be thought of as separate, they both shape the experience students have in school and the lessons that students take with them beyond school. The neoliberal agenda has impacted many aims of education, the framework under which education is organized and therefore the day-to-day experiences of students. There are also teaching methods which I find

problematic for student learning and wellbeing. Before turning to solutions, in what follows, I offer a brief expansion of the preceding critique.

Students experience schooling which seeks to discipline and instruct them rather than to support their development and learning processes. For our purposes, here, I will define these specifically as Disciplinary and Instruction methods of educating; they often do not take into account many conditions for effective and empowering learning. Neither recognize that students learn material best when it is of most relevance to their lives and their passions. Neither ask first, “what do my students need and what is most important to them?” Neither question first the significance of the material, but rather they first ask how they are to manipulate the material into the students’ head. Neither work with the student as a trusted ally but rather as the students’ information merchant and dictator, respectively. Disciplining and Instructing are only two articulations of paradigms which lead to the problems outlined in this document. While other articulations, methods and paradigms may exist that create these same or similar problems, Disciplining and Instructing are very common and have been employed in public education since its beginnings (Tulley, 2010; Dewey, 1916).

A common way of understanding the idea of *teaching* is through Instruction. Instructing is a model which places students – who are ignorant and desire knowledge – below and opposite the Instructor – who is knowledgeable, powerful and sometimes even privileged, as she is higher in status and authority. Within this framework, the Instructor’s job is to decipher already discovered information and dispense this knowledge to the student. Friere (2000) draws a comparison between this type of

teaching and a banking system. He says this “banking” model assumes that students operate like a bank account, accepting knowledge like a deposit. Therefore, a teacher’s job is to act as a banker of information, for transferring information in this way is equivalent to learning. Robert Barr and John Tagg claim that this model “mistakes a means for an end... To say that the purpose of colleges is to provide instruction is like saying that General Motors’ business is to operate assembly lines or that the purpose of medical care is to fill hospital beds” (1995, p. 13). This model often depends on standardized testing to assess the level to which students retain and comprehend class material. The Instruction model is not limited to university classrooms, and like standardized testing, it is used in high school, middle school and elementary classrooms as well.

Instruction-based-teaching creates fundamental problems for education. The methods it employs are often rather uncondusive to learning. For example, “the fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk and most students listen, is contrary to almost every principle of optimal settings for student learning” (Guskin, 1994), such as autonomy supportive, experience-based environments. It also creates problems in that it teaches students certain lessons about the learning process itself. It teaches that knowledge is something that must be given by someone more qualified and that learning is a process that occurs through the bidding of another. Award winning public school teacher John Taylor Gatto calls this “intellectual dependency” and claims that it even teaches students to trust authority figures to “make the meanings of our lives” (2004, p. 3). Not only does this Instruction model lead to ineffective and inefficient learning, it does not encourage or empower students to think for themselves

or create their own knowledge and understanding. This is problematic because this has the opposite effect that schools should have, which is to serve students in their aims to create meaning and the means with which to affect their world well.

While Instruction methods are problematic mainly because of the relationships they build with knowledge, Disciplinary methods are problematic mainly because of the relationships they build with motivation. Unlike Instruction, Disciplinary-based-teaching assumes that the responsibility of learning lies with the teacher. The term 'discipline' can also refer to belonging to a particular field of study, but within this document, it refers to a method of teaching that uses externally imposed discipline to enforce control over students and classrooms. Specifically, there is an expectation of teachers to motivate their students to learn the prescribed material. This is becoming increasingly important as 1) teachers have less time and freedom to teach more material; 2) performance standards are mandated by larger entities with more strict testing requirements; and 3) schools and teachers are more often getting paid based on student performance (Jennings, 2012; Springer et al., 2011) . While most educators in the United States no longer physically discipline their students, there is an expectation to control the classroom and what is learned in it (Reeve, 2002; Guay, Ratelle & Chanal, 2008).

Some believe that the idea that educators are responsible for Disciplining their classroom comes from old schooling models that were designed after, and prepared students for, industrial workplaces (Tulley, 2010; Robinson, 2014). Sir Ken Robinson, an international leader in education, explains that "current systems of education are based on the principles of industrial manufacturing. Most national education systems

were not invented until the mid- to late-19th century, and they grew up to meet the needs of the industrial revolution” (2014, p. 32) He draws many parallels between the industrial manufacturing process and the way students are educated. He claims that students are treated like factory products, made in batches, standardized to specification, and rushed through for efficiency and cost-effectiveness (2014).

Discipline is needed when the priorities of the teacher do not match the priorities of the students. For example, this can happen when curriculum is not perceived to be relevant to the student’s life or important for her future. This leads to a common “problem of motivation” for educators, often solved in the short term with Disciplinary tactics of rewards, punishments and threats. One of the first psychological studies on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from forty years ago proclaimed that even though,

many of the activities we ask children to attempt in school may be of some initial intrinsic interest to at least some of the children, the effect of presenting these activities in the context of a system of extrinsic incentives and adult surveillance may be to undermine that intrinsic interest in those activities. Unwittingly, these studies suggest, we often turn activities of initial interest into drudgery which children engage in only when external pressure are present to force or lure them to do so. (Lepper & Greene, 1975, p. 484-485)

We understand now that motivation is much more complex than simply delineating it between internal and external sourcing (Deci & Ryan, 2008), yet after four decades of developments within education and our understanding of motivation, this candid passage remains expressive of many students’ experience with today’s schooling. It is

still common to find unmotivating content that often is “fixed” with attempting to draw some connection to the students’ lives, but this does not make the material motivating. It only makes it temporarily palpable. As psychologist, philosopher and education reformer John Dewey points out, “to attach importance to interest means to attach some feature of seductiveness to material otherwise indifferent; to secure attention and effort by offering a bribe of pleasure. This procedure is properly stigmatized as ‘soft’ pedagogy” (1916, p. 114). Coursework which is of obvious importance to the student would not need these disciplinary methods.

The true problems with both the neoliberal agenda and Disciplinary Instruction is that they are not only ineffective for student learning but *disempowering for a democratic society*. Teaching methods uncondusive to learning are a waste of everyone’s time and resources. Gatto looks back at the American Revolution and notices that literacy of free peoples was close to total. Even though this does not represent everyone present at the time, the point is that the national school had not yet begun and there were “no schools to speak of – read Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography for an example of a man who had no time to waste in school” (Gatto, 2004, p.5). Still, worse than wasting people’s time is causing harm. If an educational system runs in such a manner that the students who come through it must sacrifice their interests, autonomy and liberty, they are serving a role not far from Plato’s concept of a slave. He saw a slave as “one who accepts from another the purposes which control his conduct” (Dewey, 1916, p.78). Modern teaching methods which are by nature inconsiderate of how children learn and what is important to them are similarly oppressing.

Gatto claims that the real job of teachers is to enforce lessons that are not found in the overt curriculum but in the hidden curriculum found in how schools are structured, how material is presented, how relationships between teachers and student are formed and kept, how time and livelihoods are managed, etc. Based on a lifetime of award-winning teaching, he claims that schools are built to teach these seven lessons: confusion, class position, indifference, emotional and intellectual dependency, conditional self-esteem, and surveillance. According to him, these are “prime training for permanent underclass, people deprived forever of finding the center of their own special genius” (2004, p. 6).

If we are to educate students to be thoughtfully engaged members of society, we must rethink the entire framework of educational experiences. Twenty years ago, Barr and Tagg reported that a shift is taking place to prioritize student learning over older paradigms such as the Instruction one I discussed above. Barr and Tagg write that they have, “witnessed reformers advocate many of the new paradigm’s elements over the years, only to see few of them widely adopted. The reason is that they have been applied piecemeal within the structures of a dominant paradigm that rejects or distorts them” (1995, p.14). Reforming the experience that students have within education is still needed and requires a paradigm shift, rethinking the very tenets and framework of why and how we run our schools.

Essentially, the critique of education is that it does not do what education should do, empower students to understand and affect the world well. Instead it prepares students for dutiful employment as if their societal destiny is dependent upon their

marketability. Not only does education not prepare students for a democratic society, but it employs methods that are ineffective for and harmful to the learning process.

As a response to these problems, I propose a way of thinking about education that will help educators better achieve effective, meaningful and moral student learning. This approach to the educational experience is best described as *thoughtful engagement*. It is a perspective grounded in democratic educational ideals, but distinct because it is a pedagogical approach grounded in both philosophical and psychological research. It recognizes the complex inseparability of educational aims and methods, and it offers perspective for reflection on educational paradigms and methodologies.

Part 2: Thoughtful Engagement

Education is inherently social, emotional, cultural and cosmological as well as academic. For through education, “by various agencies, unintentional and designed, a society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideas” (Dewey, 1916, p. 15). It shapes the way young people see and interact with the world around them. This is a responsibility of education’s curriculum but also an inevitable result of its methods, intended or not. To deliberate over the content and methods of education is to deliberate over the communities surrounding schools, including the nation and the world. As Plato argued, to educate is to participate in the design of society (Dewey, 1916).

This paper builds upon the democratic ideal of education. As such, Amy Gutmann argues that education’s central responsibility in society is to empower students to understand the world, evaluate it, discern between the options it provides and then participate in shaping and improving it (1987, p. 429-430). Likewise, Dewey argues:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. ... A society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. (1916, p. 80)

While there are differences among those who argue for democratic forms of education, I suggest these general aims coalesce on one central aim: *The purpose of education should be to empower students to be thoughtfully engaged in the world.* Put another way, education should help make students more moral, motivated and empowered to, in Gandhi's honor, make the world they wish to see. I pose that enacting thoughtful engagement as the ultimate goal of education will do this.

A thoughtfully engaged individual can be defined through the following features. She would seek awareness and consider incoming information critically. She would uphold moral inquiry, obligation and reflection. Finally, she would recognize her ownership in her own experience and be dedicated to intentionally influence her surroundings. Thus, I propose the following formulaic expression to capture this recipe:

Thoughtful Engagement = mindfulness + compassion + activism

Similar terms and phrases could include: considerate behavior, caring, acting with compassion, deliberate living, democratic citizenry, activism, and making the world a better place.

In many instances, making the world a better place has been an educational goal. Just this year for example, the president of Yale proclaimed in his baccalaureate address that, "your purpose in life as a graduate from Yale is simply this: to improve the world.

In the Jewish tradition this is called *Tikkun Olam*, literally to *repair the world*” (“2015 Baccalaureate Address,” 2015). He recognizes that while this is a common topic of graduation speeches, it is at the heart of what it means to have a degree and to go forth into the world with the right intentions. If *Tikkun Olam* is really at the heart of education, it should be the framework of all educational material, not just brought up at graduation speeches.

As important as they are, even having good intentions is not enough to effectively improve the world. We need to be very careful about *how* we engage as well. In the same baccalaureate address at Yale, the president’s first example of how to improve the world is problematic, “When you start a new business that employs people and contributes something new, you improve the world” (“2015 Baccalaureate Address,” 2015). While this may be assumed as an improvement within the neoliberal agenda, I advise that we couple all good intentions with caution. For example, producing DMT, high fructose corn syrup, BPA, and the atomic bomb all contributed something new that created employment opportunities. Innovation and employment *can* and often *do* improve the world, but do not necessarily. Often even when we intend to improve the world with something new, we leave messes behind that can unintentionally cause great harm. While moral intention lies at the heart of thoughtful engagement, this must be strengthened with the knowledge and ability to apply the intention well. I will return to this difficult issue in a later section; before addressing that issue, we first need to examine the relationship of the *what* and *how* of education more carefully.

Often the two questions, “What are we to teach young people?” and, “How are we to aid them in their learning?” are asked in separate settings and discussed by different groups. Some argue that the intent and content of a classroom shapes the very nature of how material is taught and the relationship between educator and student (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Meanwhile, others argue that the method of teaching “is the only real content” (Gatto, 2004, p. 7). There are inseparable relationships between aims and methods of education. Thus, thoughtful engagement here is posed as an educational goal but also as a way of thinking about the process of learning. Like Barr and Tagg explain in their article about educational paradigms, the goal of education not only defines what students are to learn, but *how* they are to learn (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Prioritizing thoughtful engagement does not simply change the material (*what* students learn), but also *how* educators structure the learning experience.

Considering the ongoing struggles of modern education in America, an integration is needed between philosophic ideals of education and knowledge of the learning and development processes from the field of psychology. Much philosophic and political discussion exists arguing for various aims and roles of education in a society. The variety of school models offer another experimental discussion of the possibilities and challenges of education. Psychologists have investigated the nature of human development, morality, motivation and learning. Little dialogue exists to explore the learning effectiveness of democratic methods of education in partnership with psychological research. This is problematic because claims made by educators and educational philosophers often stand illigitimized by critics who value the empirical process of the scientific fields. Likewise, psychology research in education can be seen

as illegitimate by those who have spent their working lives educating and thinking about learning experiences. These fields have much to gain by collaborating. Thus, in this project, I investigate how educators can most effectively empower students to be thoughtfully engaged in the world using a dialogue between various fields of study and work.

Based upon a compilation of psychological research, philosophical arguments, and accounts from educators, I argue we should follow the innate learning tendencies that result from certain conditions of human development. If educational priority is given to meeting a student's physiological and psychological needs while supporting their moral development, the motivation to learn will result in learning which is relevant, meaningful and useful to the student. Therefore the question is posed: *How do educators foster thoughtfully engaged students?* Because the how of this argument is inextricably bound to the what, answering this question will simultaneously offer more detail and justification for adopting thoughtful engagement as a general educational aim as well. As a result, this document combines philosophical and psychological research with that on educational pedagogy to construct a framework for reflection, design and decision making. To be clear, it does not provide how-to-guides and detailed curriculum suggestions, nor does it presume to present a full understanding of the learning process. Instead, my aim is to offer principles to guide further reflection and refinement.

At its heart, the framework I develop is premised on the belief that people are excellent learners, proactive caretakers and innovative creators by nature. Philosopher, psychologists and school headmaster A.S. Neill says that all young people are at heart

creators, and that they, “learn what they want to learn in order to have the tools that their originality and genius demand” (Neill, 1960, p. 26). They do not need to learn how to do these things. Essentially all they need is to have their physical and psychological needs met and to be in a supportive yet stimulating and challenging environment which guides them to engage thoughtfully in the world around them. As I will develop in what follows, in this environment, learning is inevitable and innate rather than forced.

The framework I propose is also built upon the presumption that, like Dewey and Neill also posit: someone cannot simply be taught to be thoughtfully engaged. No matter what content educators are tasked with, they “can’t make children learn. They have to create conditions where kids want to learn” (Robinson, 2014, p. 33). The task of educators then becomes to foster thoughtful engagement to fruition through the students’ natural propensities to learn, care and act.

I posit, then, that learning comes as a *result* of developing in specific environments. Dewey summarizes that, “to train a mind is to provide an environment which induces... intelligent or purposeful engagement in a course of action” (1916, p. 123). Foremost, a person must have her basic physiological and psychological needs met in order to develop moral character and motivation to pursue learning. When this happens, ideal student characteristics result such as curiosity, persisting through hard problems, and seeking other points of view. From these attitudes and behaviors come the experience, information and abilities that empower students to be fully engaged in their world. This process is depicted in Figure 1.

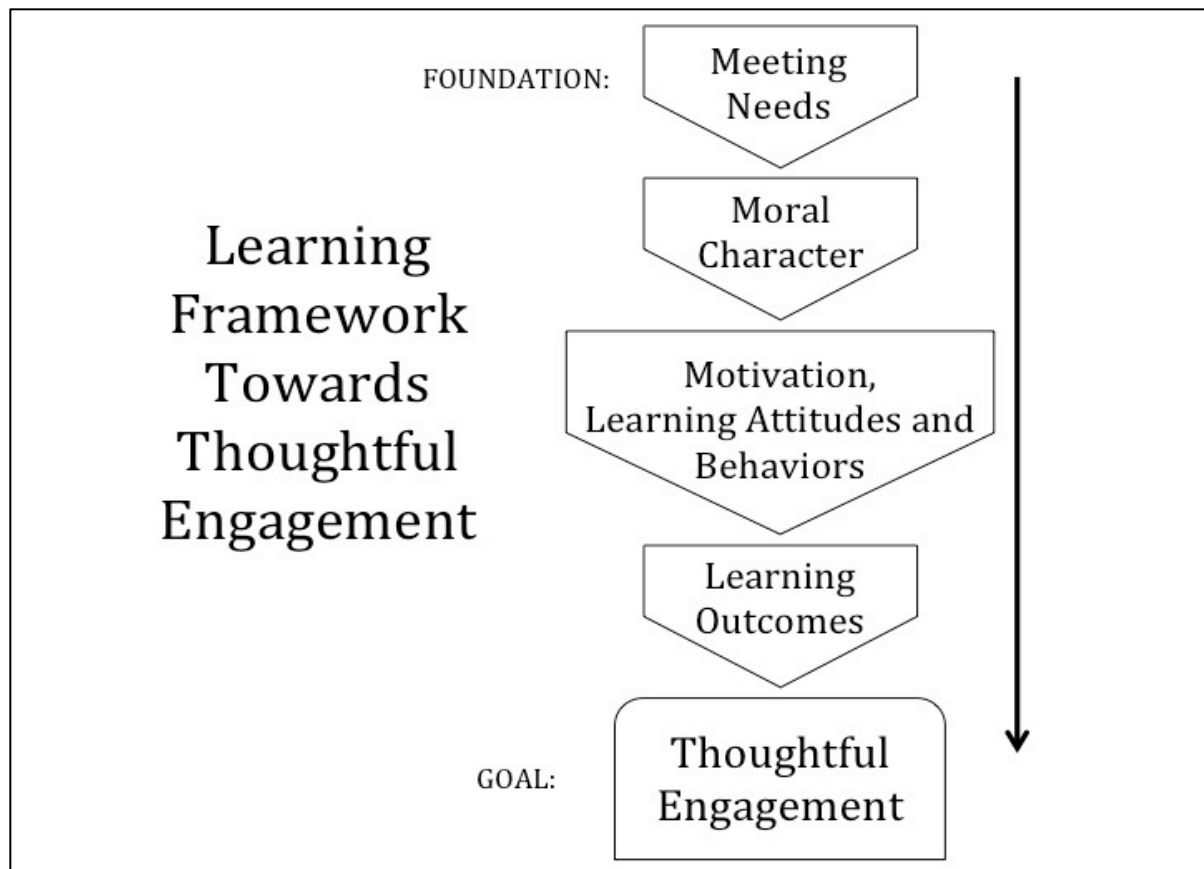


Figure 1: This model depicts a framework to be used for the design and facilitation of educational experiences intended to foster thoughtfully engaged students. It expresses the importance of certain steps and relationships within this learning process. The arrow signifies an innate sequence of learning development as well as the order of importance given to each of these steps if thoughtful engagement is the educational goal. These steps are expanded on in Part 3: Conditions for Learning as Framework for Design.

Centrally, both fields claim that there are inseparable relationships between a student's behavior, capacity for learning, motivation, moral development, and the extent to which needs are met. Understanding these relationships will help educators create supportive environments which allow for the innate capacity to develop into an educated and therefore thoughtfully engaged individual.

Part 3: Conditions for Learning as Framework for Design

Meeting Needs

Addressing a student's needs is the single most important way that educators can assist the learning process. In this way, this step is the starting place and foundation of all learning.

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943), all behavior is motivated to fulfill a person's own needs. The absoluteness of the statement is intended. He describes a hierarchy which begins with basic physiologic and safety needs and advances through higher needs of love, esteem and self-actualization. It is a hierarchy and not a list because each set of needs places itself on a scale of importance. For example, a parent would prioritize making sure her child is safe from imminent harm, like sickness or violence, before considering if the child feels like she fits in well at school. A person's present attention will be focused on attending to her most basic needs in the hierarchy.

Maslow describes satisfied needs as a state of homeostasis. For example, someone would be in physiological homeostasis once her organismal operations are properly in order – when her well-oxygenated blood is circulating through her brain and other organs properly; when she is intaking appropriate levels of macro- and micronutrients; when her systems of repair, growth and hormone management are operating well. It is at this point of homeostasis that this set of needs is removed from the center of attention. Until then, our needs consume our attention, time and other resources.

[A] peculiar characteristic of the human organism when it is dominated by a certain need is that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change. For

our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined very simply as a place where there is plenty of food. (Maslow, 1943, p. 374)

Maslow's "hungry man" will not be consumed by existential questions of his place in the cosmos but rather how he will feed his hungry belly. This man's homeostasis is his utopia, but new needs will never cease to emerge because once he becomes fed, he may well begin to wonder and worry about other things. Homeostasis is a concept, rarely if ever fully realized because when one need is satisfied, another is noticed and takes its place in our attention. Our motivations then move from one need to the other up and down the hierarchy.

At the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy lie physiological and primitive requirements: food, water, nutrition, appropriate temperatures, sleep, sexual desire, maternal care. The next layer in the hierarchy are safety needs, to protect that which we find dear and to avoid danger. Danger could take the form of illness or infection, violence, natural disasters, betrayal, failing crops, crashing stock value and many others besides. He categorizes these as "basic" needs because attending to them assists us in operating as an organism and as a species, but a person's needs go beyond hunger and sickness. Maslow claims that there are three general categories of "higher" needs, culminating in emotional, social and epistemological needs. The third category includes needs to give and receive love, affection and a sense of belonging. After those come esteem needs – desires to feel confident, adequate, strong, capable, and independent. Highest of the higher needs is what he calls self-actualization:

Even if all these needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is

doing what he is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be. (1943, p. 383)

These five families of needs are mapped on a pyramid. Self-actualization is located at the apex, being the highest level of human experience. It articulates needs to fulfill or actualize one's potential, to become all one is capable of becoming.

This map is useful in that it helps us understand how the human experience most often prioritizes its attention between its requirements, yet it leaves much unrepresented. There are many other families of needs that do not fit nicely into the pyramid. Maslow himself discusses the need to know and understand as one belonging nowhere and everywhere on the pyramid because it takes many different forms. "Acquiring knowledge and systematizing the universe have been considered as, in part, techniques for the achievement of basic safety in the world, or, for the intelligent man, expressions of self-actualization" (p. 385).

Psychologist William Glasser offers another hierarchy with some important differences. He summarizes a person's basic needs as: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun (1999). He claims that the need for love and belongingness is in practice the most important need of them all, for the connectedness we experience with others is requisite for fulfilling the other needs. Another noteworthy difference between his and Maslow's model is the need for power, control, or choice, as he prefers to summarize it. He claims that taking away the power of choice from another is the source of most human disconnection, itself "the source of almost all human problems such as what is called mental illness, drug addiction, violence, crime, school failure,

spousal abuse, to mention a few” (The Glasser Approach, 2010). He argues that recognizing and addressing people’s needs is central for success in all human interaction, and has especially applied these ideas to therapy and education.

One modern body of psychology literature separates needs into physiological – the needs we have to keep up our bodies as a mammal – and psychological – the needs of our mind. Psychology researchers Ryan and Deci claim that people of all cultures and all ages have three basic psychological needs. Satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness predict psychological well-being for all people (2008). These needs are not placed into a hierarchy like Maslow’s and Glasser’s, because they are each “essential nutriments,” in that, “individuals cannot thrive without satisfying all of them, any more than people can thrive with water but not food” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.75).

As these models and articulations of needs are compared, the complexity of human needs becomes more apparent. Adding to this complexity is that all of these needs are present simultaneously, while emphasized differently. While Maslow places needs into a hierarchy, he recognizes that it is “not nearly as rigid” as the model implies (1943, p. 386). It is often the case that there is a reversal in the hierarchy, when for example needing to belong becomes more important than eating or perhaps sleeping. Additionally, most behavior is multi-motivated, in that they are “determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one” (p. 390). Regardless of what model we use and how we categorize a person’s needs, it is agreed that neglecting or abusing them leads to suffering, sickness and ill-being while meeting them leads to contentment, happiness and well-being (Maslow, 1943; Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 74).

For these reasons, meeting needs is central to learning. Unmet needs distract the student because they require her attention. For example, asking a student to engage in a discussion about a historical event when she is distracted by thoughts of an abusive family member and fatigued with an early onset of pneumonia will likely result in a low quality participation, at best. On the other hand, having needs met makes way for innate and effective learning attitudes and behaviors. The study of children shows that, in good health, they are naturally “active, inquisitive, curious and playful, even in the absence of specific rewards” (Deci & Ryan, 2008 p. 70; Harter, 1978).

The more a student’s needs are met or satisfied, the more he or she is able to operate under more complicated needs and therefore learn more about topics beyond herself. This explains the addition of lunch programs, nurses, counseling offices and safety programs in schools. As we acknowledge that needs go beyond the basics – such as satisfying student’s psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness – we can more effectively adjust our student support. Glasser believes that, for example

if we structure schools to satisfy basic human needs for belonging and for power—for instance, by providing for team learning—students will be less susceptible to destructive influences in their lives and will come to see school as a need-satisfying place. The result will be fewer discipline problems and more learning. (Brandt, 1988, p. 38)

If educators wish for students to have interest in the Pythagorean theorem, Hamlet, Newton’s second law of thermodynamics or the founding fathers, they must also consider how these topics interact with students’ needs.

When students feel cared for, another important thing happens. Students perceive the school and the educators to be *on their side*. This allows for a greater potential for students, educators and administration to work cooperatively toward a common goal of learning. While this may be a simple and seemingly utopian idea, it changes everything for the student. Dewey points out that this allows for a communally driven “social control of individuals without the violation of freedom” (1938, p.54).

The more that a person’s needs are met, the more that she is able to care for people and things beyond herself. This is a matter of attention and resources. It is also a matter of modeling moral behavior. If we want our students to be caring individuals, we must first teach them that meeting our own and other’s needs is important and therefore set an example to care. By caring for student needs, we allow them to become more caring and interested individuals. Therefore, the capacity for developing moral character is enabled and enhanced by having one’s needs met.

Moral Character

I place developing moral character as the second step in the learning framework toward thoughtful engagement. While morality is not a necessary ingredient for learning alone, it is essential for learning toward thoughtful engagement. It leads the student towards building and seeing meaning in her life. This meaning leads to more self-determined motivation towards learning and engaging thoughtfully. It is the largest missing element in education ran by neoliberal agendas.

What is deemed moral varies greatly between perspectives, individuals, groups, and circumstance. According to psychologists, morality can be controlled or automatic and take the form of emotions, intuitions, reasoning, judgments, behavior, values,

systems and foundations (Haidt, 2001). Educator and philosopher Nel Noddings's articulates moral development as building a capacity to care (2005).

The diversity of morality is great. What set of morals are taught to students is of course up to the community, school parents and teacher. Additionally, in spite of this diversity and also because of it, it is essential that educators help students decide for themselves what is important to them and therefore how they are to act. Therefore, I define having moral character as pursuing the *process* through which an individual reflects upon and continually shapes their moral values, feelings, judgments and behaviors.

Educators play an important role in aiding the development of moral character. Developing moral character allows students to create meaning, interest, and motivation. Creating and seeing meaning in their lives gives a filter through which they can better engage in learning experiences. For example, when a student decides that her physical health is very important to her, topics such as nutrition, anatomy, health and exercise science, and perhaps recreational studies will be of keen interest to her. It will be easier and more enjoyable for her to learn the properties of proteins, and the muscular effects of stretching and the role of the endocrine system when she sees the importance of understanding and applying this information as she goes about her life. This position of interest essential for meaningful learning that will be applied to thoughtful engagement.

To begin exploring the concept of morality, I will begin with perspectives from psychologists who have long asked questions of morality. These include not only, "what is it?" but, "what purpose does it serve?" and, "where does it come from?" An

additionally relevant question to educators is, “how do we help develop or influence a person’s moral character?”

In seeking to define morality, for decades psychologists have taken philosophical ideas and compared them to cultural systems of morality across the world. These ideas were then studied alongside modern studies of the various forms of morality including intuition, judgment and behavior. These series of studies have concluded that,

there are five psychological systems, each with its own evolutionary history ,
that give rise to moral intuitions across cultures. Each system is akin to a kind of
taste bud, producing affective reactions of liking or disliking when certain kinds
of patterns are perceived in the social world. Cultures then vary in the degree to
which they construct, value, and teach virtues based on the five intuitive
foundations. (Haidt & Graham, 2006, p. 104)

The first system of these five is Harm/Care, described as having sensitivity to signs of suffering or cruelty and the corresponding emotional and social reactions such as empathy, helping, preventing harm, approval of kindness, etc. The second system is Fairness/Reciprocity, described as treating others as they have treated you or as you would like to be treated. This system can be emotionally motivated (anger, guilt, and gratitude) or socially motivated through various cultural virtues surrounding justice (Haidt & Graham, 2006).

Whereas liberal morality relies mostly on ideas of justice and care, conservative morality rests on these next three systems as well (Haidt & Graham, 2006). The third is Ingroup/Loyalty. It is described as “recognizing, trusting and cooperating with members of one’s co-residing ingroup, while being wary and distrustful of members of

other groups” (p. 104). Virtuous embodiments of this include loyalty, patriotism, and heroism. The fourth is Authority/Respect, described as virtues that derive from and support “hierarchically-structured ingroups, where dominant males and females get certain perquisites but are also expected to provide certain protections or services” (p. 105). These virtues include respect for superiors, good leadership, service, and obedience. The fifth is Purity/Sanctity, a reverence for spiritual and physical virtue and disgust at the carnal passions and unpure features, appearances, occupations, and behavior.

It is possible that these five moral systems, or foundations, can come into conflict and even override one another. Researchers recognize that this identification is only one step in mapping the moral domain and that while some of these categories may have significant overlap, others remain to be named and incorporated (Graham et al, 2011).

Another breakdown of moral character is provided by Hamlin, a psychologist who researches morality in infants. She says that moral cooperation necessitates at least three elements. The first is a moral goodness: feeling empathy, concern and desire to help. The second element is moral evaluation: identification and analysis of others’ social behaviors and their value towards the cooperative system. The third element is moral retribution: carrying out of moral action oneself, supporting or rewarding moral action in others, and discouraging “those who misbehave” (Hamlin, 2014, p. 187). This combination of feeling, analysis and retribution is similar to the three-part break down of thoughtful engagement – compassion, mindfulness and activism – in that they both include responding emotionally, logically and socially or physically to the situation. In

this way Hamlin's recipe for moral character is representative of the heart of thoughtful engagement.

Some form of moral character is essential for a well-functioning group, even considering that it takes culturally diverse forms even within the US. Work on morality between many fields including biologists, anthropologists, primatologists and psychologists have led to modern conclusions that morality is largely a tool of social function (Hamlin, 2014; Haidt, 2007). Hamlin summarizes that, "the moral sense evolved to sustain collective action and cooperation—which lead to great mutual gain but sometimes require personal sacrifice—within groups of unrelated individuals" (2014, p. 187). If education is to prepare its students to live in communities in any sense, then feeling, thinking and acting collectively is essential.

If moral character is so important, we then need to think about where it comes from and how can we as educators can shape and develop it. Based on many years of research, we now understand that morality comes from three places: we are all born with some moral sense, it is culturally shaped through social interactions, and it is individually developed through intention (Haidt, 2001, 2007; Hamlin 2007, 2014). I will explore each of these sources.

Some capacities and tendencies toward care are evident in even preverbal infants and considered innate. This negates old ideas that children are born immoral or amoral, without a moral sense (Hamlin, 2007). One collection of studies claims that "infants' moral inclinations are sophisticated, flexible and surprisingly consistent with adults' moral inclinations, incorporating aspects of moral goodness, evaluation and retaliation" (Hamlin, 2014, p. 191). Researchers deduce that these are innate because

the level to which children can understand and respond to moral interactions is far beyond what could possibly be taught to them. Yet our moral character does change and grow as we do.

In order to explore how individuals and groups shape morality, I would like to introduce the roles of moral intuition and moral reasoning. For a long time, in the wake of Kohlberg's research, psychologists thought of moral behavior as being a result of a reasoning process. Now most propose that "the building blocks of human morality is emotional" and takes the form of an automatic process experiencing feelings of good-bad or approach-avoidance, (Haidt, 2007, p. 998). This is now being called moral intuition. Moral reasoning, on the other hand, is a controlled mental process that evaluates information about a situation in order to reach a moral judgment. Relative to the cognitive sources of moral intuitions, the neural systems and mechanisms that control judgment and behavior developed recently in the evolution of the human brain, only within the past 100 thousand years along with the development of language. Moral psychologist, Jonathan Haidt summarizes that moral intuition leads moral behavior much more than moral reasoning, which "when it occurs, is usually a post-hoc process in which we search for evidence to support our initial intuitive reaction" (2007, p. 998).

These facets of morality – intuition, reasoning, judgment and behavior – are all capable of being shaped socially and at the individual will. "There are at least three related processes by which cultures modify, enhance or suppress the emergence of moral intuitions to create a specific morality: by selective loss, by immersion in custom complexes, and by peer socialization" (Haidt, 2001, p. 827). Cultural influences also affect an individual's moral intuition and behavior. While our intuition-led moral

judgment may not be immediately sourced in moral reasoning, ex-post-facto reasoning can affect other people's intuitions. "Moral judgment is not just a single act that occurs in a single person's mind but is an ongoing process, often spread out over time and over multiple people (Haidt, 2001, p. 828)." The classroom can be the medium for this process.

As educators, we can create an environment in schools that is a safe and encouraging space to reflect on and discuss moral decisions, hence collective post-hoc moral reasoning. These moral conversations create opportunities for the individuals who are a part of them to reflect on their own intuitions and slowly shape them. Schools can also encourage reasoned judgment. While it is rare for reasoning to override initial intuitions, "people may at times reason their way into a judgment by sheer force of logic" (Haidt, 2001, p. 819). Through reflection, a person can also "activate a new intuition" and retire unwanted ones through selective loss (p. 819). By creating a space for fair-minded social persuasion, reasoned judgment and private reflection, educators can help students develop their own moral intuitions and therefore influence their moral behavior.

Haidt gives a vision for schools by reflecting on the community schools that moral psychologist Kohlberg created in the 1970's.

By making high school students create their own rules, enforce their own discipline, and vote on numerous policies, Kohlberg created an environment where students enacted democracy... Years of such implicit learning, coupled with explicit discussion, should gradually tune up intuitions about justice, rights, and fairness, leading perhaps to an automatic tendency to look at problems from

multiple perspectives. By creating a community in which moral talk was ubiquitous (Link 3, reasoned persuasion) and in which adults modeled good moral thinking, Kohlberg may well have strengthened his students' tendency to use Link 6 (private reflection) on their own. (2001, p. 829)

The important point is that the school provides a space for the students to enact and manage this moral development process. Attempts to teach moral thinking and reasoning skills as a subject usually show little effect in the students' moral behavior, and even less outside the classroom (Haidt, 2001). Therefore, teaching moral thinking must instead be a process which both provides (through challenging questions and situations) and protects (through providing safe spaces physically, socially and emotionally) students' opportunity to collectively and individually shape their own moral character. This process makes for more predictable and dependable behaviors than enforced ones because they are intrinsically motivated.

One educational philosopher and experienced teacher Nel Noddings's claims that schools can foster moral character by simply caring for their students. She says the tendency to care is fostered through first being cared for, then through modeling, discussion and reflection (2005). Noddings argues that a caring relationship is not possible without the recipient feeling cared for (2005). In the context of the teacher-student relationship, this concept is important because it affects how well the two will be able to work together in the common goal of learning as opposed to confronting as enemies. Yet in the case of modeling "what is care?" I argue that when someone gives care to an unknowing recipient, it still counts as caring. A lack of perceived reciprocity should not disqualify people from receiving care who cannot recognize it. Care is often

viewed as something that happens between two people, but Noddings expands recipients of care to these groups: the self; the inner circle; strangers and distant others; animals, plants, and the earth; the human-made world; and ideas (2005). Expanding the way that we think about care is important because the way that individuals care (for all six of Noddings's categories) define the way that they live. Noddings describes caring as an inherent "attitude of solicitousness" that creates one's "ultimate reality of life" (2005, p. 15) What each of us decides is important drives everything we pay attention to, sense, understand, make, do and long for. It is our reason to engage at all. Noddings says that we need an educational framework that, "speaks to the existential heart of life—one that draws attention to our passions, attitudes, connections, concerns and experienced responsibilities" (p. 47). The way that an individual shapes her moral character defines the meaning of her life. This is additionally important to an educational experience because it enhances a student's tendency towards self-determined motivation, therefore leading to more effective learning attitudes and behavior.

Teaching care is important for the learning process alone and also for influencing the way that the student will interact with their communities in and out of school. Noddings summarizes her argument towards and recipe for a "shared living and responsibility" here in four parts. The first states that,

There are centers of care and concern in which all people share and in which the capacities of all children must be developed. The second, closely following the first, is that education should nurture the special cognitive capacities for "intelligences" of all children ... A third is that the focus on centers of care and

the development of capacities must be filtered through and filled out by a consideration of differences that are associated with race, sex, ethnicity and religion... [Lastly,] if we are doing the work of attentive love, we must care deeply for them. We want to preserve their lives, nurture their growth and shape them by some ideal of acceptability.

While the debate over the size and scope of the moral domain continues (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2011), it does not include whether or not moral action, regardless of its form, is important. Despite this, the importance of moral character development in educational settings is in debate (Noddings, 2005).

Its presence in school settings is in debate because it is not essential to learning. Learning in neoliberal systems often happens without it. However, it *is* essential towards meaningful learning that empowers thoughtful engagement and towards building cooperative communities. I think Noddings articulates Dewey's philosophy (1916, 1938) on this well by summarizing,

He insisted that students must be involved in the construction of objectives for their own learning; that they must seek and formulate problems, not simply solve ready-made problems; that they should work together in schools as they would later in most workplaces; and that there is an organic relation between what is learned and personal experience. (2004, p. 11)

It is in people's nature to care. We must let them and not teach them otherwise. If we are to teach our children the importance of improving the world around them, we must first listen to their hearts and never stop doing so. Children are better off learning nothing than learning that things they care about are not important.

Before we move on, I would like to review a couple important points. First, the more that a student's physiological and psychological needs are met – including importantly the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness – the more that she will be self-determined to pursue learning and will thrive in school settings (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Reeve, 2002). Second, we have discussed several ways of classifying and understanding morality, its importance for social function and learning, and possibilities for educators to involve students in shaping their own. The connection between what a student cares about how she engages in learning is an important one (Noddings, 2004; Dewey, 1916). The dual implications of words like 'care' and 'interest' express this. For example, I can both care for my elderly grandmother and care about a political issue, but the two different uses of care are not so far apart. According to psychologist and philosopher of education, John Dewey, interest "expresses (i) the whole state of active development, (ii) the objective results that are foreseen and wanted, and (iii) the personal emotional inclination" (1916, p. 113). This description of interest reflects the position that motivation plays in the learning progression. They are both preceded by meaning and emotional desire for a particular outcome and they both lead to attitudes of participation.

Motivation can express self-interest and interest beyond the self. For example, a person's curiosity about gardening could come from a pure desire to know and understand, yet it is also possible that this same curiosity is morally motivated. Gardening could also express an interest to care for oneself (health, competence, relatedness), one's family (health, food safety, financial security), soil, climate systems, or an idea such as self-reliance.

Motivation, Learning Attitudes and Behaviors

To psychologists, the topic of motivation is “a central and perennial issue ... for it is at the core of biological, cognitive and social regulation” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p.69). It is the drive for positive and effective learning attitudes such as curiosity as well as effective learning behaviors such as consideration, critical thinking, engagement, and inhibition (Guay, Ratelle & Chanal, 2008). Motivation effects the learning experience immensely because, “people whose motivation is authentic ... have more interest, excitement and confidence, which in turn is manifest both as enhanced performance, persistence and creativity and as heightened vitality, self-esteem, and general well-being” (Ryan and Deci, 2000 p.69). When the conditions allow for the right types and strengths of motivation, students can thrive in school settings. The challenge for educators then is to support and even strengthen these propensities to learn through the relationships and environments we surround students with.

One challenge of modern methods of teaching – including instructional and disciplinary – is that the responsibility of learning lies with the educators and the school, not with the students (Barr & Tagg, 1995). This leads to a common “problem of motivation,” which views motivation as an act which a teacher *does* to a student.

Teachers these days are expected to induce a desire to learn in all students. But all students already want to learn; it is a question of what they want to learn...

There are few things that all students need to know, and it ought to be acceptable for students to reject some material in order to pursue other topics with enthusiasm. (Noddings, 1992, p. 19)

Charging educators with motivating their students creates unnecessary work and stresses their relationships with their students. Both learning and teaching would benefit greatly from allowing the student be autonomously motivated.

To put it simply, and as I discussed above, motivation can be delineated between internal and external sources. For example, does a student make good grades as a result of her fascination with the material and her enjoyment of the work, or do her parents reward her to make good grades and punish her for bad ones? Internally motivated behavior is driven by “the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity,” whereas externally motivated behaviors “are undertaken to attain an end state that is separate from the actual behavior” (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002, p. 42). A third type, amotivation, is the relative absence of motivation. It typically does not lead to behavior to achieve an outcome and is associated with unfulfilled needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

Decades of thought and research have led psychologists to say that motivation does not separate concretely between internal and external sources. Neither does it come all or nothing. There are not only different types but different qualities, and these are more important than the total amount in affecting behavior and satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2008). One way to differentiate these is to place them on a spectrum of determinism. On one end of the spectrum, behavior is nonself-determined or controlled (amotivated behavior), and on the other behavior is entirely self-determined or autonomous behavior (intrinsically motivated behavior). This spectrum model allows for considering different types of extrinsic motivation, which also spans between more nonself-determined and more self-determined. While some means of regulating

external motivation can be very controlled through external rewards and punishments, some external motivations can be internalized to the point that it feels internally sourced (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Research has long showed that nonself-determined extrinsic motivators such as external rewards and adult surveillance decreases a student's interest in the topic over time (Lepper & Greene, 1975).

For instance, imposing extraneous rewards, deadlines, and verbal directives on students all effectively induce an external perceived locus of causality. And, telling students that their performances will be evaluated, providing controlling performance feedback and introducing a competitive set that focuses on winning all effectively decrease volition. Similarly, assigning students tasks to perform creates a sense of obligation that works against the perception of choice. (Reeve, 2002 p.)

Some educational programs attempt to address these goals one at a time and separate from the prescribed material, for example trying to teach students creativity with artistic assignments.

One risk of extrinsically motivated students is that failure feedback leads to a learning attitude called "learned helplessness." While, autonomously motivated students would see failure as a challenge, students dependent on extrinsic motivators, who are "characterized more by low perceptions of control or self-determination,... come to see achieving these goals as less determined by their own responses than... factors outside of their control" (Boggiano & Barrett, 1985, p. 1753-1754). Experiencing learned helplessness not only affects responses to failure feedback, it has effects

“developmental shifts in motivational orientations” (p. 1760). As these students progress through years of school, they show increased preference for easier, less challenging tasks and greater dependence on teacher approval. Effects such as learned helplessness should be considered when educators employ controlling methods, for students have needs for competence and autonomy that may not be getting met.

We know that autonomous motivation leads to many successful learning attitudes and behaviors (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002; Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008). These positive effects includes behaviors: persistence and achievement, cognition: learning and challenge seeking, and affective outcomes: “more positive emotions in the classroom, greater enjoyment of academic work, and more satisfaction at school” (Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008, p. 235).

The challenge for educators then becomes to create learning environments where students are autonomously motivated and will therefore thrive in school settings. Autonomy supportive teaching involves being,

responsive (e.g., spend time listening), supportive (e.g., praise the quality of performance), flexible (e.g., give students time to work in their own way), and motivate through interest (e.g., support intrinsic motivation). Controlling teachers essentially take charge (e.g., hold the instructional materials, use directives/commands), shape students toward a right answer (e.g., give solutions), evaluate (e.g., criticize), and motivate through pressure (e.g., seem demanding and controlling). (Reeve, 2002, p. 186)

The way in which a teacher motivates her students has a direct impact on how self-determined a student not only behaves but views him or herself to be. In this way

autonomously motivated behavior meets a student's psychological needs, which then create a space for more autonomously motivated behavior, resulting in a positive feedback loop.

Supporting a student's ability to self-motivate necessitates structure, rather than abandoning it. While autonomy support obviously serves to meet students' need for autonomy, optimal structure can nurture a student's need for competence (Reeve, 2002). This leaves the need for relatedness. This can be nurtured with interpersonal involvement, with a relationship between teacher and student that involves a dedication of time, energy and care (Reeve, 2002).

When a student is driven by more autonomous and intrinsic types of motivation, she will innately experience attitudes and behaviors conducive to learning and well-being. This is accomplished by supporting the student's basic needs and moral development. The learning that comes from these types of motivation will have momentum toward applying them thoughtfully.

Learning Outcomes as Empowerment Toward Thoughtful Engagement

Learning outcomes are some of the most commonly discussed and debated issues in education. They are essentially the answers to the question: "What should students know when they graduate?" Many of the answers are subject-based: reading, writing, arithmetic, knowledge of history, understanding of economics and politics. Increasingly, schools are also being tasked with teaching skills such as critical thinking, public speaking and working well with others. Collectively, these subject and process goals are typically thought of as the aim of education. Many argue schools exist to teach

students the content of these various subjects and describe these aims as learning outcomes.

Under the framework posed here, learning outcomes are understood differently. Rather than being a pre-established set of topics or skills to be determined by the school system, they are instead a description of the ends that are important to the student, as well as the results of the learning process (including the possibility that many things can be learned that are not intended as learning goals). Thus, the emphasis is shifted away from the outcomes themselves to what lies before and after.

Learning outcomes are being given relatively little attention in this document compared to what they normally receive. This is intentional. I believe is not entirely helpful for educators to discuss what information and skills students need without considering the context and interests of the student. I do not suggest that deciding learning outcomes be tasked to students alone. Each student should be allowed a respected voice as a cooperative partner in designing her learning experience alongside her peers, the teacher, her parents, and the community.

I would also like to expand learning outcomes to not only include knowledge, and skills, but also perspective, experience, ways of thinking, ways of learning, delay of gratification, and even deciding what is important to oneself. To me these are more important learning outcomes than information-laden subjects. Information is becoming increasingly accessible and is meaningless without the opportunity to use it toward a greater application.

Meaningful application of school material is essential for students. If they do not understand why they are being asked to learn a particular topic, the more external

motivations that teachers have to impose upon them. Neil asks, “what earthly good can come out of discussions about French or ancient history or what not when these subjects don’t matter a jot compared to the larger question of life’s natural fulfillment—of man’s inner happiness” (1960, p. 24)? This “so what?” thinking is central to students from the very beginning of their educational experience.

In addition to being the facilitator of experiences, a leader of groups and a caretaker, I pose that educators should be learning assistants. The sources of each student’s internal motivations are up the student to find, develop and act upon. The student must choose how she wants to thoughtfully engage the world. The educator’s job is to assist her in learning the tools to engage in her own way. Therefore, learning outcomes should be tools for empowerment as means to thoughtfully engage the world.

Part 4: Discussion

Empowerment

One idea of teaching is seeing it as an art of *guiding* a student on their own path, supporting them and challenging them when seen fit. The distinguishing feature is that the teacher’s job is not to show the student the way, but to allow the student to find, or decide, what way is her own. While this may be an old, and sometimes romanticized, philosophic idea, it has many implications on the experience that a student has while in school. This idea aligns with the democratic ideal of education in that, as summarized before: education’s central responsibility in society is to empower students to understand the world, evaluate it, discern between the options it provides and then participate in shaping and improving it (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 1987). The important point is that these tasks – understanding, evaluating, discerning and participating – are

the responsibility of the student; the educator is there to assist in the student's ability to accomplish these on her own.

A distinction therefore needs to be made between two interpretations of the word *empowerment*. The popularity of using the word empowerment in alternative education highlights a frustration with the disempowering nature of mainstream educational experiences. Its intention is sound and important. The way that empowering programming can be presented, however, can take away the very powers that it is trying to give.

Under one understanding of the term, a teacher would empower her students. This interpersonal use of the word implies that there are two parties involved, one with power and one without, and that power can be and is given from the powerful to the powerless. According to Freire, this idea of empowerment is not fully possible because if power is given in this fashion, it shows the "empowered" that they 1) do not have power, 2) need to be given power by those who have it, and therefore 3) cannot have that power without the permission and desire of those who have it. Therefore this type of empowerment is self-defeating, because power cannot truly be given (2000).

Empowerment is also understood as an experience in which one person realizes their own power. Freire says that this is the only way for a person or a group to become truly empowered (2000). Guiding or fostering the student's learning process would leave a student's power to understand, evaluate, discern and participate with the student from the beginning. If the student has had the power to self-educate and apply what she has learned all along, this second use of empowerment would have been

happening all along. Therefore, employing the first use of the term would never be needed, even if it were possible.

French philosopher and educator Jaques Rancière takes this second understanding of empowerment to question what makes a good teacher. He argues that the person teaching does not have to be an expert in the subject because her task is to aid the student in learning on her own. Not only is it possible for the teacher to be “ignorant” of the subject, it might even be better for the student because it creates intellectual equality between student and teacher. Rancière says that equality should be the starting point of learning, rather than an outcome of someone becoming educated. Any person who feels reliant on another, even an expert, for their “intellectual emancipation” is oppressed. He explains that, “there is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another ... whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies” (Rancière, 1991).

If empowerment is the goal of the teacher, perhaps the most important lesson is simply that the student has the power to ask and answer her own questions, the power to educate herself. The student must decide what is important to her, how she is to go about working towards her own goals, and assembling the resources she needs to accomplish them. One of the most important tools that educators can encourage within students, especially in countering neoliberal advancements, is to think for themselves (Echeverría & Hannam, 2013, p. 122).

Implications for Educators

This document does not propose that educators need to work harder for their students. Most teachers, especially the ones who care greatly for their students, are far

too underpaid, overloaded and understaffed for me to suggest that they do more. I pose that educating alongside this framework toward thoughtful engagement would make the educator's job far less burdensome and more rewarding. This being said, there are some skills that a teacher would especially need in order to foster thoughtfully engaged students using the framework outlined in this document. While there are some additional skills to be adopted and practiced, many that are presently needed will present unnecessary.

If we help our students identify and address problems themselves, we reveal their ownership in their own world and therefore allow for their intrinsic motivation for improvement to drive their own education and participation in our society. In this way, prioritizing student ownership leads to more efficient and effective efforts of education as well as more engaged individuals.

Giving students an environment where they can claim their own power requires some relinquishing of absolute control by the educator. This could include control over classroom structure (socially and physically), curriculum, student behavior, school structure, scheduling, testing, etc. Dewey says that,

When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of a leader of group activities.

(1938, p. 59)

Relinquishing the role of a disciplinarian and adopting the role of a leader within a community of learners means not only relinquishing some control, but interacting with students in a way that promotes openness and trust. Echeverria and Hannam claim that,

“critical to a pedagogy seeking to enable young people to think for themselves with others, is going to be one that takes young people’s ideas and points of view seriously” (2013, p.115).

Providing an environment which leads to vibrant, student motivated learning can make teaching subjects much easier for both students and teachers. Gatto claims that it does not take thirteen years of approximately 180 eight-hour days of school to reach high school graduation competence in these subjects. He says,

the truth is that reading, writing, and arithmetic only take about one hundred hours to transmit as long as the audience is eager and willing to learn. The trick is to wait until someone asks and then move fast while the mood is on. (Gatto, 2004, p. 5)

The style of teaching traditional literacy as Gatto suggests necessitates that the teacher is perceptive enough to the interests of the students that they would be able to identify when to “move fast” and when to move to something more interesting and relevant to students.

It is essential that teachers are supported to themselves assist their students with autonomy supportive environments. The pressure that teachers feel affects the way that they teach. The more that a teacher feels expected to control the outcomes of the class – through colleague expectations, curriculum requirements and performance standards – and the more that they feel expected to perform by non-self-determined students, the less likely they are to be self-determined themselves in their teaching methods. In turn, this leads them to be more likely to become controlling with their students (Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque & Legault, 2002). This can and often does lead to a

destructive positive feedback loop. The more controlling the teacher becomes, the more externally motivated and amotivated their students become, leading the teacher to again to become even more controlling. Realities such as this make it especially difficult for educators to change educational practices within a framework unconducive to them.

Conclusion

Young people seek answers to big questions like “Who am I? What role do I, and *could* I, play in the world? Why should I care? What is important to me?” Helping students answer these questions I believe is more important than learning any ammount of information without meaningful application. I am not arguing that traditional learning outcomes be cast aside in favor of existential exploration. I am instead arguing for a shift in emphasis, one which cares for all the needs of students including their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

For any subject, learning can be an invigorating experience. The human brain is wired to reward us to learn. We receive dopamine releases when we learn information meaningful to us. However, when a connection is made between the part of our brain that manages learning and the part that recognizes surprises, which we normally dislike, we experience one of the highest dopamine releases that our brain is designed for (Tulley, 2010). This is the “Ah-ha!” or “Eureka!” feeling that hooks lifelong learners. If this connection is not used, however, it can atrophy just like a muscle. It needs exercising.

Learning can also be a liberating experience. When education is truly centered in the needs and interests of students, it serves students as a gateway to realizing their

dreams. Emancipating the abilities and intellect of the student is an essential task of education, but this liberty should be a *means* to a purposeful end. As Dewey argues:

Such freedom is in turn identical with self-control; for the formation of purposes and the organization of means to execute them are the work of intelligence...

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process. (1938, p. 67)

This is the importance of being thoughtful and caring, of creating meaning as a foundational element of learning.

Educating toward thoughtful engagement with this framework is possible for any educational entity. They can be pursued by educators, administrators, parents and the students themselves. In order to enact framework effectively, an entire paradigm shift is required. Gatto agrees that, “no tinkering will fix it,” (2004, p. 6) and Noddings claims that improving the curriculum is not enough (2005). Yet all-or-nothing strategies easily lead to nothing because shifting an entire education framework could be lifetimes worth of work. Small, immediate changes within existing systems can and do make a difference for students, yet in the situations when these changes are the most needed these changes are adopted by those who have the least outside support to realize them.

Humans have immense capacities for learning and doing. To truly empower students to thoughtfully engage the world, an educator’s task is to support that student with an environment which allows her to realize her own powers to thoughtfully engage. This must begin by caring for the student’s needs, basic and complex,

physiological and psychological. Meeting needs removes distractions and makes way for moral agendas. Then developing one's moral character drives the student to create meaning, interests and motivation to participate in her context in ways that are important to her. This motivation leads to innate learning processes, which result in the lessons themselves.

I propose that we view the role of an educator as not only a caretaker, but a leader of a community of learners, and an instigator of reflection. An educator is one who challenges students to define for themselves the meanings of their lives, the purposes to which they will employ their passions and energies, and how they are to thoughtfully engage. An educator must then aid students in gaining the tools with which they will thoughtfully engage in their world.

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